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Wilson, Woodrow

*The Mexican Question.*

THE ARTICLE BY PRESIDENT WILSON REPRINTED HERE APPEARED IN THE ISSUE OF THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL FOR OCTOBER, 1916.

Large questions are difficult to state in brief compass, but they can be intelligently comprehended only when fully stated, and must to all candid persons seem worthy of the pains. The Mexican question has never anywhere been fully stated, so far as I know, and yet it is one which is in need of all the light that can be thrown upon it, and can be intelligently discussed only by those who clearly see all that is involved.

In the first place, it is not a question which can be treated by itself as only a matter between Mexico and the United States. It is a part, a very intimate part, of the Pan-American question. The two Americas can be knitted together only by processes of peace, friendship, helpfulness, and good will, and the nation which must of necessity take the initiative in proving the possibility of these processes is the United States.

A discussion of the Pan-American question must always begin with the Monroe Doctrine, and very little light will be thrown upon it unless we consider the Monroe Doctrine from the point of view of Latin-America rather than from the point of view of the United States.

In adopting the Monroe Doctrine the United States assumed the part of Big Brother to the rest of America. The primary purpose of the policy was to prevent the extension to the American Hemisphere of European influences, which seemed likely to involve South America and eventually ourselves as well in the net of European intrigue and reaction which was in that day being spread with so wide a sweep of purpose. But it was not adopted at the request of the American republics. While it no doubt made them measurably free from the fear of European aggression or intervention in their affairs, it neither gave nor implied any guarantee on the part of the United States that we would use our power for their benefit and not for our own aggrandizement and advantage.

As the power of the United States has increased, the uneasiness of the Latin-American republics has increased with regard to the use we might make of that power in dealing with them.

Unfortunately we gave one very disquieting example of what we might do when we went to war with Mexico in Mr. Polk's time and got out of that war a great addition to our national territory.

The suspicion of our southern neighbors, their uneasiness as to our growing power, their jealousy that we should assume to play Big Brother to them without

their invitation to do so, has constantly stood in the way of the amicable and happy relations we wished to establish with them. Only in very recent years have they extended their hands to us with anything like cordiality, and it is not likely that we shall ever have their entire confidence until we have succeeded in giving them satisfactory and conclusive proofs of our own friendly and unselfish purpose.

What is needed for the firm establishment of their faith in us is that we should give guaranties of some sort, in conduct as well as in promise, that we will as scrupulously respect their territorial integrity and their political sovereignty as we insist that European nations should respect them.

If we should intervene in Mexico, we would undoubtedly revive the gravest suspicions throughout all the states of America. By intervention I mean the use of the power of the United States to establish internal order there without the invitation of Mexico and determine the character and method of her political institutions. We have professed to believe that every nation, every people, has the right to order its own institutions as it will, and we must live up to that profession in our actions in absolute good faith.

Moreover, "order" has been purchased in Mexico at a terrible cost when it has been obtained by foreign assistance. The foreign assistance has generally come in the form of financial aid. That financial aid has almost invariably been conditioned upon "concessions" which have put the greater part of the resources of the country which have as yet been developed in the hands of foreign capitalists, and by the same token under the "protection" of foreign governments.

Those who have successfully maintained stable order in Mexico by such means have, like Diaz, found that they were the servants, not of Mexico, but of foreign *concessionaires*.

The economic development of Mexico has so far been accomplished by such "concessions" and by the exploitation of the fertile lands of the republic by a very small number of owners who have accumulated under one title hundreds of thousands of acres, swept within one ownership the greater part of states, and reduced the population of the country to a sort of peonage.

Mexico is one of the treasure houses of the world. It is exceedingly to be desired by those who wish to amass fortunes. Its resources are indeed serviceable to the whole world and are needed by the industries of the whole world. No enterprising capitalist can look upon her without coveting her. The foreign diplomacy with which she has become bitterly familiar is the "dollar diplomacy," which has almost invariably obliged her to give precedence to foreign interests over her own. What she needs more than anything else is financial support which will not involve the sale of her liberties and the enslavement of her people.

Property owned by foreigners, enterprises conducted by foreigners, will never be safe in Mexico so long as

their existence and the method of their use and conduct excite the suspicion and, upon occasion, the hatred of the people of the country itself.

I would not be understood as saying that all or even the majority of the foreigners who have owned property in Mexico or who have developed her extraordinary resources have acted in a way to excite the jealousy or deserve the dislike of the people of the country. It is fortunately true that there have been a great many who acted with the same honor and public spirit there that characterized them at home, and whose wish it has never been to exploit the country to its own hurt and detriment.

I am speaking of a system and not uttering an indictment. The system by which Mexico has been financially assisted has in the past generally bound her hand and foot and left her in effect without a free government. It has almost in every instance deprived her people of the part they were entitled to play in the determination of their own destiny and development.

This is what every leader in Mexico has to fear, and the history of Mexico's dealings with the United States can not be said to be reassuring.

It goes without saying that the United States must do as she is doing—she must insist upon the safety of her borders; she must, so fast as order is worked out of chaos, use every instrumentality she can in friendship employ to protect the lives and the property of her citizens in Mexico.

But she can establish permanent peace on her borders only by a resolute and consistent adoption in action of the principles which underlie her own life. She must respect the liberties and the self-government of Mexicans as she would respect her own. She has professed to be the champion of the rights of small and helpless states, and she must make that profession good in what she does. She has professed to be the friend of Mexico, and she must prove it by seeing to it that every step she takes is a step of friendship and helpfulness.

Our own principles and the peace of the world are conditioned upon the exemplification of those professions in action by ourselves and by all the nations of the world, and our dealings with Mexico afford us an opportunity to show the way.

Mexico must no doubt struggle through long processes of blood and terror before she finds herself and returns to the paths of peace and order; but other nations, older in political experience than she, have staggered and struggled through these dark ways for years together to find themselves at last, to come out into the light, to know the price of liberty, to realize the compulsion of peace, and the orderly processes of law.

It is painful to observe how few of the suggestions as to what the United States ought to do with regard to Mexico are based upon sympathy with the Mexican people or any effort even to understand what they need and desire. I can say with knowledge that most of the suggestions of action come from those who wish to possess

her, who wish to use her, who regard her people with condescension and a touch of contempt, who believe that they are fit only to serve and not fit for liberty of any sort. Such men can not and will not determine the policy of the United States. They are not of the true American breed or motive.

America will honor herself and prove the validity of her own principles by treating Mexico as she would wish Mexico to treat her.









